

## ABOUT HUNGARIAN MUSIC AND THE GYPSIES

The best interpreter of the Hungarian folksong is the gypsy and is generally identified by their music. All the feast or name days in the villages are known to the cigany musicians who come to play without being asked. No peasant fete, no great social event in the city or tete-a-tete beneath the thick close stars is quite complete in Hungary without the heartbreaking wail of a gypsy violin. A strain of sadness runs through all their folk-songs and ballads and when the music is not fiery and quick, it is full of longing and melancholy like the great horizonless *puszta* of Hungary.

The gypsies are a wandering race believed to be of the two countries they have settled in large numbers (Spain being the other). They are not related to the Hungarian people but have found the Magyars more friendly than other nations and adopted its musical talent and taste entirely to the country in which he lives. They reflect the changing moods of the Hungarian soul from the highest peak of gaiety to the lowest depth of despair. The gypsies are to be found at the outskirts of almost every town in either tumbled down hovels or just in a warren of holes in a bank.

Many sad and wistful songs came into being during the Turkish rule and Wars of Liberation and a tribute is given to the gypsies who preserved the Nations' music and songs when others were forbidden to play them through the dark times of oppression.

The pride of the Hungarians is the immortal *Ference Liszt*, one of the world's greatest pianist, born son of Prince Eszterhazy's bailiff and helper to the mighty Wagner. He reformed symphonies and brought the Magyar musical world to its full flower.

There are two special Hungarian musical instruments worth mentioning. One resembles the ancient bugle of the Rakoczi Army, around 1700, and is called the "Tarogato". Its music was so stirring that the Austrian Emperor considered it dangerous and banned the instrument. There are only a few left in existence today. The other is the "Cymbalom" which is similar to a piano but without any keyboard. It is a rather low table with wires stretched over it and played with softly padded hammers tapped up and down rapidly. In a gypsy band it is the cymbalom which binds together the music of the orchestra but the soul is the first violin or *Primas* who leads the melody.

## VINTAGE TIME: THE END OF THE SZURET

Betty Blanche Szekely



Although sweet wines are produced from the grapes of Badacsony and Somlyo and bull's red wine from Eger Szekszard, none can compare with, or is as famous as the amber colored Tokaj aszu. The wine of Tokay is world-known with that strange and fragrant draught, gold to the eye, silk to the tongue and fire to the blood. Grown on the sun-loved slopes of the ancient volcanic range in Northern Hungary, it is the fourth largest wine-growing country and has been recognized for several centuries as the best in the world. Their wines are said to have special tonic values and curative powers due to chemical composition and the high percentage of sugar, phosphorus

and vitamins.

In early October, when a silvery mist covers the green pastures for the first time, the vineyards become dotted with the colorful costumes of the grape-pickers. From sunrise to sunset, the hills echo with laughter, singing and music, for the vintage days or *Szuret* are the gayest of the year. Everyone shares the holiday mood including the horses, decked out in bright colored ribbons hung over their ears and harness. The whole countryside gives off the delicately sweet scent of ripe grapes and the nostrils are filled with the delicious aroma of soup and rich red gravied *Gulyas* cooking over an open fire.

The vinedresser is in charge of the vineyards who appoint a place to each girl where she is to pick and to each man a hod into which the girls have to empty their full baskets. The men then carry the full hods to the press-shed and empty the grapes very carefully into the vine-press, the first step in making their famous wines.

When the end of the vintage comes, it is always celebrated with much festivities. According to custom a merry procession, starting from the vineyards to the farmer's house, is lead by two people who carry an enormous bouquet of grapes hung on a pole over their shoulders and followed by the grape-pickers in their festival attire. In the house of the vineyard owner, the grapes are hung on the ceiling and during all this ceremony, the *kulacs* or wine-jar of foalskin filled with the intoxicating sharp new wine is passed from hand to hand and toasts are drunk to the good health of the host while the gypsies play their jolliest tunes. Later, the grape-pickers are seated to a rich repast followed by dancing which often lasts until the next day.

In America, too, they celebrate the end of the *szurest*, however, in quite a different manner. The ceiling of the dance hall is handsomely hung with grapes, apples, pears and leaves for a festival mood. Around the walls they sometime have quaintly decorated booths selling *Mezes-Kalacs*. These cakes are shaped in many forms which are richly ornamented with colored frosted candy and some even have eloquent little poems printed on a piece of paper and stuck on mirrors. They are considered very fashionable gifts for sweethearts, especially the heart-shaped cakes but can be bought in the form of dolls, hussars, deers, rosairies, swords, etc.

It is the custom after the *szurest* ends for *zsellers* (non-owners of grape yards) to go back into the fields and look for any remaining grapes, when due permission is given by the owner, providing they are careful and do not break the plants as then the privilege of free picking is taken away.

This ceremony is exemplified here at one point of the dance when the band plays a continuous *csardas* and a procession of those in Hungarian costume dance, sing and march around the hall before acting as protectors of the hanging fruit. This is know as "Szabad a lopas" and the dancing couples try to steal the grapes without being caught. However, if caught, they are brought in front of the *biro* (judge) where they have to pay a fine for the stolen fruit; the proceeds of which are donated for good causes to churches or lodges.

Father: "Get up son, the morning is half gone. What do you suppose Abraham Lincoln was doing when he was your age?"

Son: "Haven't any idea, pa, But I know what he was doing at your age!"

## ABOUT THE CSARDAS

(CHARDASH)



The dance of the Magyar is strenuous, graceful and exciting. There are many varieties of the *csardas*, all marked with a tempo, a lightness and dash rare in folk dancing. Certain varieties of these Hungarian dances like the "Lassu, Ugros Tipegos and Bukos Csurdongolo" were very popular with men-folk of the country who usually danced them in the village taverns or *Csarda*; hence, the name of *csardas* which is really a combination of several popular dances.

The *Csardas*, received public attention for the first time in Hungary, when on February 13th of 1840, it was performed by a group of twenty-four couples (sons and daughters of the nobility) at the National Casino in Budapest.

Prior to this date the dance had been seen only on Sundays and holidays in the small villages of the countryside where the peasant folk gathered at the farms of neighbors or in small social groups. However, there are records of this dance being in existence since 1736 even earlier.

Popularized by the nobility, the *Csardas* soon became fashionable for groups of all ages and all classes, and has remained in vogue for more than a century.

Today, in Hungary, the *Csardas* is danced principally in the smaller cities and towns where the inhabitants demand that the gypsies play the "slow dance" or the "quick dance." These terms refer to the fact that the *Csardas* is composed of a slow part, the "lassen" and a rapid part, the "gyors." In the "lassen" the dancers move in a horizontal plane, swinging the head and trunk rhythmically from side to side as the foot movements are performed. In the "Gyors" there are many quick hops and jumps requiring movement in the vertical plane.

In Part the courtesy of Joseph Bercei of Blue Danube Cafe.

## MAGYAR INDEPENDENCE DAY

March 15, the Hungarian Independence Day is probably as memorable to the Hungarians as the Fourth of July is to us Americans. It has been, to this day, revered as the symbol of the new ideals of liberty and has become one of the chief National holidays of Hungary. There never was a group of people who have shown a greater love for freedom or who fought more valiantly for their rights or who played such an important and heroic role in the development and perpetuation of Christain civilization.

Hungary is one of those Southeastern European contries whose unfortunate people were forever paying in blood and misery for wars not of their own choice for only after the arrival of the Hungarians did the plains of the Danube and Tisza become at once the granary of Europe as she started to produce the world-famous high quality of wheat which helped to mitigate the famines of an era when the potato was as yet unknown in Europe. Fiery wine, fragrant fruits, excellent horses, pedigree cattle grew and thrived in blessed abundance under the hands of a people eminently gifted in agricul-



Upper picture: Members of the South Side American-Hungarian group and elders who took part in the Roseland (Chicago So. Side Community) Centennial celebration in June 1949. Lower picture: The Hungarian-American group doing the "Kor Magyar" dance on a Roseland street during the Centennial fesitivity.

(Photo Paul Yuhasz)

ture. Hungary stood on an incoparably higher level of civilization and has roused, more than once, the appetite of many Nations. Invasions occured occasionally from the East by the Tartars and Turks. From the West, the Germans tried again and again to germanize the country and the Austrian Empire endeavored to overwhelm Hungary every since her existence, for about one thousand years.

As early as the 19th century, reforms were started to liquidate the terrible social and property conditions within Hungary and to abolish feudalism and serfdom, i.e., to end the system whereby a servant (*jobbagy*) was bound to an estate by a nobleman (*nemes*), and who carried the burden of heavy taxation alone while the *nemes* enjoyed the fruit of his *jobbagy's* labor. Hungary was unable to develop her economic or industrial life under Austrian rule as both her taxes and raw materials were extracted from the country. Above all the Hungarians wanted their independence from Austria and to govern her own affairs without relations to any foreign power. This was the importance of the War of Independence, which actually started March 15, 1848, as the struggle, for the first time in history, was to free herself of foreign rule and have equality among her people. And that is why this revolutionary war puts into motion the country as a whole and fills the memory of every Hungarian with enthusiam even today. The people were fighting for indivisible, internal and external freedom.

Grof Stephen Szechenyi, was among the first of the nobility to arouse the national spirit to preserve the national language, and dared speak in his native tongue to the Parliament where his influence was enormous. However, he was a conservative and believed thorough changes could be made on the basis of mutual agreement with the Hapsburg Monarch. Lajos Kossuth, great fighter of Hungarian Liberty and important political figure, clearly saw that the reforms they asked for would never be put into effect to the advantage of the common people through arbitration. Therefore, Kossuth called upon the Nation to prepare and defend with all her strength, its freedom and independence.

On March 15, 1848, dynamic masses of the Hungar-